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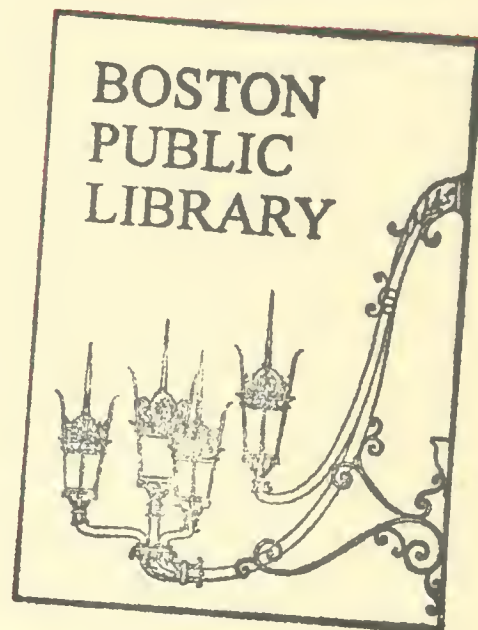
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# — THE — HINGE BLOCK PLAN



PLAN TO MANAGE GROWTH



CITY OF BOSTON Raymond L. Flynn, Mayor  
BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY Stephen Coyle, Director

September 1990



CITY OF BOSTON

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September 1990



# **HINGE BLOCK PLAN**

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## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



*The Hinge Block is a unique area that differs from the rest.*

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Hinge Block lies midway between Downtown and the Back Bay, at the center of the Midtown Cultural District and adjacent to the thriving Chinatown neighborhood. Identified as a connector or "hinge" between these areas, the block holds great potential to link Midtown's theatre areas, to strengthen the relationship between Chinatown and the Cultural District, and to become itself a new focal point for neighborhood businesses, cultural facilities, and residential development.

### Policy Recommendations

The goal of the Hinge Block Plan is to balance economic growth with preservation of architecturally significant buildings while ensuring that critical benefits are generated for the public and, in particular, for the adjacent Chinatown community. Planning for the Hinge Block is directed by a set of policy goals in each of the following areas:

Historic Preservation

Open Space

Cultural Facilities

Urban Design

Development Strategy

Environmental Constraints

Housing

Chinatown

Neighborhood Businesses

Transportation

### Historic Preservation

The Hinge Block contains several significant historic buildings that contribute to the historic fabric of the area and which would in-

fluence the scale and character of future development on the block. Four structures are city-designated landmark buildings and are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The preservation objectives for the Hinge Block are:

- to preserve the significant historic buildings which contribute to the block's architectural character and incorporate those buildings into the block's revitalization scheme;
- to retain and reactivate the block's historic street and alley pattern;
- to improve the historic alleys for pedestrian access and circulation through the block, and
- to reactivate La Grange Street as an active pedestrian way.

### Open Space

The Hinge Block today has one park, a small open space in front of the China Trade Center, known as Liberty Park. Lacking a continuous program of regular maintenance, the park has fallen into a state of neglect. A plan to rejuvenate the park through redesign or programmed maintenance should be developed.

The Hinge Block has potential for new open space to enhance the area's public realm and provide an important amenity for residents of Chinatown. Creating a small pocket park at Washington Street on the north side of La Grange Street should be considered. A covered pedestrian galleria along



La Grange Street would provide an enhanced urban space for the Hinge Block. Designing a small public park, not unlike the popular Paley Park in New York, should be considered for the sunny south side of the block along Stuart Street.

The open space policy objectives for the block are:

- to upgrade, redesign, and maintain Liberty Park;
- to reactivate La Grange Street with new urban spaces and pedestrian amenities, including a small park at its eastern end in order to extend the network of open spaces to and from Chinatown;
- to create a new park for the use of residents of the Hinge Block, Chinatown and neighboring communities, and daytime workers;
- to restore the special and unique character of historic alleys such as Tamworth Street to serve as attractive pedestrian paths into the block, and
- to develop a streetscape plan consistent with the Midtown Cultural District Plan.

## Cultural Facilities

The Hinge Block contains one historic theater, currently inactive. The Galety (now Publix) Theatre was built in 1908 for vaudeville and burlesque. The block also contains the Art Cinema which features adult movies, and the Exploit Gallery, an avant-garde art gallery.

The location of the Hinge Block midway between the theaters on Tremont Street and those on Washington Street, as well as its proximity to the Newbury Street art galleries, presents an opportunity to expand cultural facilities on the block.

The policy goals for creating additional cultural facilities on the Hinge Block are:

- to explore the reuse potential of the Publix Theater, or if reuse proves infeasible, to provide a comparable theater in a new development;
- to encourage the expression of Asian art and culture on the Hinge Block;
- to include space for cultural facilities such as art galleries in new development, and
- to incorporate public art and sculpture into new development projects.

## Urban Design

A successful plan for the revitalization of the Hinge Block should be informed by a consideration of the block's strongest assets: its premier location in the center of the theatre district, its proximity to Chinatown, Downtown Crossing and Boston Common, and its architecturally significant historic buildings.

The urban design goals and objectives for the block are:

- to increase activity both day and evening by incorporating retail stores, cafes, restaurants, and galleries with office, residential, and hotel use;
- to create a new public urban space at the center of the block with ground-floor retail along LaGrange Street, possibly similar to Milan's Galleria, a pedestrian arcade;
- to create and restore attractive pedestrian connections to Chinatown;
- to complement the theater district by emphasizing uses which would attract theatergoers, such as restaurants, cafes, and attractive spaces for strolling and sitting;
- to create distinctive architectural treatments, special lighting, and innovative signs at entry points into the block, and



- to develop standards and guidelines for streetscape improvements, including lighting, paving and street furniture.

## Development Strategy

Future development on the Hinge Block will be guided by the following development approach:

- to explore development scenarios that accommodate a mix of uses on the block, including office, hotel, housing, and retail functions with each scenario having cultural facilities and a new public open space;
- to incorporate a hotel on the block to complement theatre district activities and ensure 24-hour uses on the block, and
- to provide cultural facilities and ground floor retail use to realize the basic planning premise of the Mldtown Cultural District Plan.

## Environmental Constraints

The Hinge Block is adjacent to the Chinatown community as well as several of the city's important public open spaces and pedestrian areas. These assets create some environmental constraints for new development on the Hinge Block. The massing and heights for new buildings on the block must be designed so as to minimize negative environmental impacts, such as increased wind velocity or shadows on the pedestrian environment, the area's historic resources, and the Chinatown neighborhood.

## Housing

The revitalization of the Hinge Block creates an opportunity for additional housing particularly due to its proximity to the

Chinatown, Bay Village, and South Cove neighborhoods.

There are currently 325 units of housing in the block. The Hotel Touraine building on the corner of Boylston and Tremont Streets has approximately 276 residential apartments. Three small buildings on Tremont Street also have residential units on the upper floors, as do two small row houses on La Grange Street.

The housing objectives for the block are:

- to supplement the block's existing housing by extending the area's housing east from Back Bay, Park Square and Bay Village, and west from Chinatown and South Cove, and
- to provide affordable housing on the block, possibly on the corner of Washington and Stuart Streets due to its proximity to Chinatown.

## Chinatown

The location of the Hinge Block, overlapping as it does both Chinatown and the Midtown Cultural District, presents a critical opportunity for establishing a relationship between the Asian community and the cultural district. The Hinge Block represents the intersection of two areas where appropriate planning policies can result in benefits to both neighborhoods.

The objectives of the Hinge Block Plan with respect to Chinatown include:

- to continue the expansion of Asian businesses in the block by creating commercial opportunities for residents of Chinatown in future development projects;
- to respect the scale of buildings in Chinatown by encouraging development on the Hinge Block that is mid-rise and incremental so as to preserve the intimate



scale, architectural integrity, and characteristic urban fabric of the neighborhood;

- to address the long-standing need for affordable housing for Chinatown families by investigating sites for affordable housing production geared to the Asian community; and
- to promote a pattern of vehicular and pedestrian traffic on the block which respects the Chinatown community and improves Chinatown's own traffic patterns and pedestrian access.

### **Neighborhood Business**

The Hinge Block's location adjacent to Chinatown accounts for the growing presence of Asian businesses in the area. The China Trade Center, for example, houses several Asian retail shops and restaurants.

The policy goals for increasing the presence of neighborhood businesses in the Hinge Block are:

- to promote the participation of Chinatown businesses, particularly those that serve area residents, and
- to ensure the equity participation of Asian developers in Hinge Block development projects.

### **Transportation**

The Hinge Block is well served by public transportation, with the MBTA's Green line Boylston Street stop and the Chinatown stop of the Orange line. Commuter rail and Amtrak's Northeast Corridor Service at South Station are a short distance from the Hinge Block, as is the Greyhound Bus Terminal at Park Square.

The Hinge Block currently has three active surface parking lots accommodating 75-85 cars.

The plan's transportation goals are:

- to encourage the reopening of an abandoned entrance to the MBTA's Orange Line on La Grange Street to facilitate public access to the block;
- to study the elimination of the existing surface parking on the block, and the feasibility of building below grade parking, and
- to assess future parking requirements for potential Hinge Block development and for nearby theaters, offices and residences.



Illustrative Site Plan

Alternative A



Alternative B



- Preserved Buildings
- Potential New Development
- Potential Open Space and Semi-covered Arcades



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## II. FRAMEWORK FOR THE PLAN



## **II. FRAMEWORK FOR THE PLAN**

### **History of the Hinge Block**

#### **18th- and 19th-Century Settlement**

The Hinge Block has played a part in Boston's history since the early 18th-century. Bonner's map of 1722 shows several houses, marking the early establishment of residences in the area. The Liberty Tree and the Liberty Tree Tavern, on the site of the present day China Trade Center building, were important gathering places for the settlement's townspeople. By the turn of the century in 1810, the Boylston Market designed by the prominent architect Charles Bulfinch, was built on this site to serve the growing community in the area. La Grange Street, the narrow street that bisects the block, was named during LaFayette's famous visit to the city in 1824, after the Marquis' country estate.

#### **Residential and Commercial Expansion in the 19th-Century**

As the 19th-century progressed, uses on the Hinge Block diversified. Residences were built: Jacob Wirth's on Stuart Street and several houses on La Grange Street are among the few examples of 19th-century row houses remaining. Mid-century, the area expanded to include commercial activities, based in part on its proximity to the railroad terminals in Park Square and in South Cove. H.H. Richardson's Hayden Building of 1875 is an example of the type of building constructed for commercial purposes in this era. The area's commercial growth continued into the 20th-century with the construction of the Union Warren Savings Bank building in 1925. The Hinge Block's mixed use character was reinforced with the construction of the Gaiety Theater,

built for burlesque in 1908, and housed in an office building.

#### **Mid 20th-Century Decline**

The Hinge Block began to show signs of decline by the early 1950s. Nonetheless, a review of the city's business directory shows businesses on the block that reflect a continuation of the type of uses attracted to the area in the first half of the century. The block's lower Washington and Stuart Street buildings were part of a garment district with manufacturers, wholesalers, and tailors. The Liberty Tree building across Washington Street housed twelve different clothing manufacturers. By contrast the Boylston Street edge of the Hinge Block was home to advertising agencies, medical offices and retail shops. A number of social clubs and services such as barbers, hat repairers, picture framers, sign painters and bakeries were located on La Grange Street.

#### **The 1960s and the Combat Zone**

By the mid-1960s, the larger area that included the Hinge Block had become known as the Combat Zone, and included what Victor Gruen in his 1967 plan for the Central Business District called a number of "honky-tonk" bars. Washington Street housed a number of adult bars, bookstores, peep shows, and movie theaters while La Grange Street became home to bars and prostitutes. Tremont Street also housed a few adult-oriented bars and one adult movie house. Most of these establishments have since closed.

#### **The Hinge Block Today**

In recent years the Combat Zone has shrunk in size. From a peak of about forty adult-oriented businesses in the late 1970s, the



number declined to twenty-five in the early 1980s, to only a handful today. This decline is due to changing social mores, the use of VCRs for home viewing of adult-oriented entertainment, federal investigations, pressure from neighboring Chinatown, and city-wide enforcement of licensing policies. The decline of the Combat Zone has coincided with the rise of Asian businesses operating in the area to serve the Chinatown community.

Of the several remaining adult-oriented facilities in and near the Combat Zone, four are in the Hinge Block. They include the Glass Slipper bar on La Grange, the Art Cinema and Caribe Lounge on Tremont, and the Peeparama Arcade on Washington Street, which has turned in its peep show license but continues its sales of adult books, magazines, videos and sexual paraphernalia.

## **History of the Hinge Concept**

The Hinge Block was named by the late Kevin Lynch as part of the development of the High Spine proposal during the drafting of the 1961 Architects Plan for Boston. According to an account by Tunney Lee, who worked on the 1960s Central Business District plans that included the block, Lynch called it the hinge block because "it was the point at which the High Spine turned." Lynch's concept called for the spine of high towers to continue through and include the block.

Interestingly, Lynch used the "hinge" concept in a prior study in 1955 for the New England Medical Center which was to explore the possibility of a medical center expansion in South Cove, the area just south of the present Hinge Block. "The area lies, as it were, at the rather weak 'hinge' of an extended central district," Lynch wrote. "From the standpoint of the city, strong commercial development at this hinge position is vital, if

it is to pull its central district together and reestablish it as a unit." It appears to have been only a short step to identify the Hinge Block as the key part of Lynch's hinge area.

## **Historic Plans for the Hinge Block**

The thirty-year history of plans for the Hinge Block is to some extent a microcosm of the history of planning for downtown Boston. Most of the Hinge Block plans follow the post-World War II urban renewal model which is based on the premise that the revitalization of a blighted area can best be achieved by the construction of a large project in the center of the underutilized area. The renewal projects were achieved either with direct public subsidies in the form of land acquisition and lower taxes, or indirect public subsidies through zoning relief for height and density.

The Midtown Cultural District Plan of 1989 diverted strongly from this model. In that Plan revitalization is achieved by directing strong uses from adjacent neighborhoods towards the Hinge Block, which is at the center of an underutilized and blighted area.

## **Common Themes in Planning**

Several common themes are apparent in all of the early plans for the block. Nearly all plans for the area have attempted to capitalize on the block's pivotal location between downtown and the Back Bay by locating a central public gathering place on the block. The 1961 Architect's Plan for Boston proposed a spine of high-rise buildings through the downtown, turning at the hinge, and continuing along Boylston Street through the Back Bay. Plans from the 1960s and early 1970s as well as current plans also recognized its position in Boston's theater district by using the block for cultural activities.



## Asian Businesses & Existing Theaters



Asian Businesses  
in the Hinge Block



Existing Theaters

- 1 Paramount
- 2 600 Washington
- 3 State
- 4 Colonial
- 5 Majestic
- 6 Shubert
- 7 Wilbur
- 8 Wang
- 9 Arts Cinema
- 10 Publix
- 11 Pagoda



## **Scale and Character**

The broad spectrum of plans reflected the values of each period, and signaled Bostonians' changing attitudes toward the scale of new buildings and the value of old ones. Early plans for the block envisioned mid- to high-rise buildings similar to Tremont-on-the-Common and called for the demolition of the block's many historic buildings. By the early 1970s, the plans envisioned a major high-rise building on the block. In the mid-1970s, there was a growing public awareness of the value of historic buildings. Plans from the late 1970s and early 1980s recognized the importance of such structures as the Jacob Wirth and Hayden buildings, but also conceded the need for height allowances to attract new investment to the block.

Current planning for the Hinge Block addresses the issue of protecting the block's historic buildings and preserving its scale and character by limiting the height of new buildings on the block. Recent studies done by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Chicago, and Benjamin Thompson Associates, Cambridge, suggest that some additional height may be possible without compromising the block's basic historic integrity. A recent study by the Center City Task Force suggests a mid-rise tower.

## **Recommended Uses in the Past**

Over the years, a variety of uses were recommended for the Hinge Block. The 1960s plans envisioned a mixed-use complex of offices, residences, cultural facilities, and a hotel. In a later plan in the mid-1970s, a new federal building was proposed as an anchor for the redevelopment of the area. Another proposal would have sited an interim or second convention facility on the block, prior to a renovation of the Hynes Convention Center in Back Bay.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, offices and a proposed communications center were the preferred uses. However a major

impediment to redeveloping the block was the negative image of the Combat Zone, with its associated street crime and prostitution and some plans proposed demolishing it. The 1974 plan led to the establishment of an official Adult Entertainment District there. The plan conceded that the Combat Zone minimized the ability to use the Hinge Block as a major pedestrian connection between Downtown Crossing and Park Square and it instead focused on Avery and West Streets as alternatives. A 1978 proposal for a housing court attempted to block off the zone from other uses.

## **Today: A Mix of Uses**

In recent years the blight associated with the Combat Zone has diminished as the Zone has shrunk in size and Chinatown has expanded onto lower Washington Street. Current planning studies suggest a continuation of this trend, and call for a mix of uses, including housing, offices, cultural facilities, open space, and commercial use with an emphasis on encouraging the continued expansion of Chinatown businesses.

## **General Context**

The Hinge Block is located at the center of the city, midway between Downtown and Copley Square, and at the center of the Midtown Cultural District and adjacent to Chinatown. Through its location it holds great potential to link the theatre areas, to strengthen the relationship between Chinatown and Midtown, and to become itself a new focal point as a block with attractive public gathering spaces and restored historic alleyways, theaters, and art galleries.

The block contains the Public Theater on Washington Street currently used for storage. There are two active theaters across from the Hinge Block on Washington Street, the Star Cinema used for Asian films and the Pilgrim Theater featuring adult films. While lower Washington Street is not inac-



tive, it is sorely in need of street improvements and additional uses which would attract pedestrians from Bay Village, Chinatown and Downtown Crossing.

The scale and character of the Hinge Block is considerably enhanced by the presence of several significant historic buildings. The Hayden Building is an important masonry commercial building by H.H. Richardson that anchors the corner of Washington and La Grange. The building is rapidly deteriorating and is in need of restoration work. Other buildings which contribute to the rich texture of the block are the Jacob Wirth and Dill Buildings on Stuart Street, the Union Warren Savings Bank on Tremont Street, the Touraine Building on the corner of Tremont and Boylston Streets, the YMCU Building and the newly renovated China Trade Building on Boylston Street.

La Grange Street is a narrow historic alley bisecting the block. Although the street has long been neglected and is currently underutilized, its location, scale, and potential restored historic character present an opportunity for it to serve as the heart of the block, around which could be planned shops, restaurants, galleries, and public spaces with connections to Boston Common, the Tremont Street theaters, upper Washington Street stores, and Chinatown.



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### III. THE PLAN FOR THE HINGE BLOCK



### III. THE PLAN

#### Rationale for the Planning Conclusions

The purpose of the Hinge Block Plan is to reverse decades of underutilization and blight on this pivotal block of the central city. The Hinge Block Plan is informed by the Midtown Cultural District Plan which was developed to revitalize Midtown as a center of commerce, culture, and city life, and the Chinatown Community Plan, developed to upgrade the quality of life and ensure the long-term viability of Chinatown as a historic residential neighborhood and a unique cultural, business, and service center.

The Hinge Block Plan is guided by certain key premises from which the policy recommendations follow.

The historic character and scale of the block must be maintained by preserving historic structures on the perimeter and referencing their height in new development.

Attractive open space must be created and properly maintained to foster a festival atmosphere and also encourage pedestrian and transit access from the neighborhoods and businesses adjacent to the block, particularly from Chinatown.

Height limits on new buildings must accomplish the mitigation of wind and shadow, especially any effecting Boston Common or Chinatown.

New development plans should incorporate spaces for the visual and performing arts.

Land use on the Hinge Block should reflect a mix of hotel, office and retail uses.

New development on the Hinge Block must respect the intimate scale, architectural in-

tegrity, and characteristic urban fabric of Chinatown.

Neighborhood businesses, particularly those of the Asian community, should be encouraged to locate in the Hinge Block.

#### Policy Recommendations

The following are recommended policies for the revitalization of the Hinge Block. The overall goal of the Plan is to balance economic growth with preservation while ensuring the delivery of important social and aesthetic benefits to the public.

#### Historic Preservation

The Hinge Block contains significant historic buildings that contribute to the character and scale of the area.

Four of the structures are city-designated, landmark buildings and are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places: the Jacob Wirth Buildings, the Hayden Building, the Young Mens Christian Union (YMCA), and the Boylston Building.

The Jacob Wirth Buildings are a pair of brick, bow-fronted Greek Revival style rowhouses built in 1844-45. The rowhouses are the only remaining examples of their type in this area, where once this building type abounded. They represent a relatively rare residential type in the central city, and serve as a stylistic link between the early Beacon Hill bowfronts and the Italianate style bowfronts of the South End dating from the 1850s and '60s. Jacob Wirth bought Numbers 37-39 in 1878 for his residence on the upper floors and restaurant on the street level. In 1889 Wirth leased Numbers 31-33 and constructed the ground floor storefront



that unites the buildings and is still in existence today.

The Hayden Building, on Washington Street at the corner of La Grange, is an important example of H.H. Richardson's commercial buildings, all the more because it is the last extant commercial building of Richardson's in Boston. The Hayden Building was built in 1875, around the same time as the construction of another of Richardson's landmark buildings, Trinity Church (1872-77).

The YMCU Building designed by Bradlee & Winslow and built in 1875, is one of only a few Victorian Gothic buildings remaining in Boston. The Union was founded in 1851 by Harvard students as a biblical Christian literature discussion group and evolved into a fellowship institution. The site for the building was chosen for its central location and its proximity to residential neighborhoods.

The Boylston Building, now the China Trade Center, was designed in 1887 by Carl Fehmer, who is known for a number of downtown commercial buildings and Back Bay residences, most notably the Governor Ames Mansion. The Boylston Building was built for the Boylston Market Association and replaced an earlier market building by Charles Bulfinch built in the federal style. The new building had retail uses on the ground level with office or wholesale uses above.

The Hinge Block also includes two imposing historic buildings that are part of the National Register Piano Row District. The Hotel Touraine opposite Boston Common at Boylston and Tremont Streets, and the Union Warren Savings Bank at Tremont and La Grange. Both buildings are important anchors for their corner sites.

The Hotel Touraine was designed by Winslow and Wetherell and built in 1897-98. The luxury hotel was celebrated as one of the finest in the city during the first quarter of the 20th-century. It replaced the Hotel Boylston, one of the city's earliest apartment

hotels which was constructed on the site of President John Quincy Adams' mansion.

The Union Warren Savings Bank was designed by Thomas M. James and constructed in 1925. The Late Second Renaissance Revival style limestone building forms an important southern anchor for the Piano Row District.

The policy goals for historic preservation in the Hinge Block are:

- to retain the block's historic street and alley pattern;
- to enhance the historic alleys for pedestrian access and circulation through the block;
- to reactivate La Grange Street as an active pedestrian and vehicular way;
- to preserve the significant historic buildings which contribute to the block's architectural character, and
- to incorporate significant historic buildings into the block's revitalization scheme.

## Open Space

The Hinge Block currently has one park, a small public area in front of the China Trade Center, known as Liberty Park. The park was designed with a series of concrete planters and brick paving. Lacking a program of regular maintenance, the planters are empty and the park has fallen into a state of neglect. A plan to rejuvenate the park through redesign or programmed maintenance should be developed to enhance this important historic corner.

Revitalizing the Hinge Block should include additional open space to enhance the area's public realm, and provide an important amenity for residents of Chinatown. Creating a small pocket park at Washington Street on the north side of La Grange should be considered. A covered pedestrian gal-



leria along La Grange Street would provide a lively urban space and important through-block connection for the Hinge Block. The possibility of designing a small public park, not unlike the popular Paley Park in New York City, should be considered for the sunny south side of the block along Stuart Street.

The open space policy goals for the block are:

- to upgrade and redesign Liberty Park and provide for its scheduled maintenance;
- to reactivate La Grange Street as an animated street with major urban spaces and pedestrian amenities including a park at its eastern end to extend the open space network to and from Chinatown;
- to restore the special and unique character of historic alleys such as Tamworth Street and Boylston Square to serve as pedestrian paths into the block;
- to develop a streetscape plan consistent with the Midtown Cultural District Plan; and
- to build a new park for residents of the Hinge Block, Chinatown, and other neighborhoods, and daytime workers.

## Cultural Facilities

The Hinge Block contains one historic theater, currently inactive. The Gaiety Theatre was built in 1908 for vaudeville and burlesque. A good example of an early 20th-century theatre interior, the Gaiety has excellent sight lines and generates a feeling of intimacy despite its 1700-seat capacity. After the decline of vaudeville and burlesque, the Gaiety was converted to a movie house and renamed the Publix Theatre. It has since closed and its interior is no longer in use as a movie house or theater.

The block also contains the Art Cinema on Tremont Street which features adult movies,

and the Exploit Gallery on La Grange Street which exhibits avant-garde art.

The location of the Hinge Block, midway between the theaters on Tremont Street and those on Washington Street as well as its proximity to Back Bay's Newbury Street art galleries, presents an opportunity to expand cultural facilities on the block.

The policy goals of the Hinge Block Plan regarding cultural facilities are:

- to explore the reuse potential of the Publix Theater, or if the Publix proves too large for current theatre space requirements or if reuse is infeasible, provide a comparable theater in a new development;
- to encourage the expression of Asian art and culture on the Hinge Block;
- to include new space for cultural facilities, such as art galleries, in new development; and
- to incorporate public art and sculpture in new development projects.

## Urban Design

A successful plan for the revitalization of the Hinge Block should be informed by a consideration of the block's strongest assets, its premier location in the center of the theater district, its proximity to Chinatown, Downtown Crossing and Boston Common, and its architecturally significant historic buildings.

The primary urban design goals and objectives for the block are:

- to incorporate retail shops, cafes, restaurants and galleries, into the development of offices, residences, and hotels to generate activity both day and evening;
- to create a public urban space at the center of the block along La Grange and



Stuart Streets with commercial ground floor activities to enliven the pedestrian experience, possibly similar to Milan's Galleria, a covered pedestrian street;

- to create and restore attractive pedestrian connections to Chinatown;
- to reinforce the block's connection to the Midtown Cultural District's theaters by emphasizing uses complementary to evening theater activities, such as restaurants, cafes, and attractive public spaces for strolling or sitting;
- to create distinctive architectural treatments, special lighting and innovative signage at entry points into the block to signal important activities. These entry points would be at Tremont and La Grange Streets, Boylston and Tamworth Streets opposite the Common, and at La Grange on axis with Beach Street;
- to develop standards and guidelines for streetscape improvements, including lighting, paving and street furniture consistent with the Midtown Cultural District.

Additional urban design requirements regarding streetwall, setback, floorplate and ground floor use are contained in the Midtown Cultural District Plan and Zoning.

## Development Strategy

Future development on the Hinge Block will be guided by the following development approach:

- to explore several development scenarios which envision a mix of uses on the block, including office, hotel, housing and retail functions with each scenario having cultural facilities and public open space;
- to incorporate a hotel on the block to complement nearby theatre district activity and ensure 24-hour activity on the block; and

- to provide cultural facilities and ground floor retail uses to support and contribute to the realization of the basic planning premise of the Midtown Cultural District Plan.

## Environmental Constraints

The Hinge Block is adjacent to Chinatown, an historic neighborhood and a unique cultural, business, and service center. It is also adjacent to Boston Common and the Public Garden, providing an unmatched quality of open space for the area's residents and tourists. Washington Street, a major retail spine and pedestrian street, extends through the Midtown Cultural District past the Hinge Block. Liberty Park provides a small open space for Washington Street pedestrians.

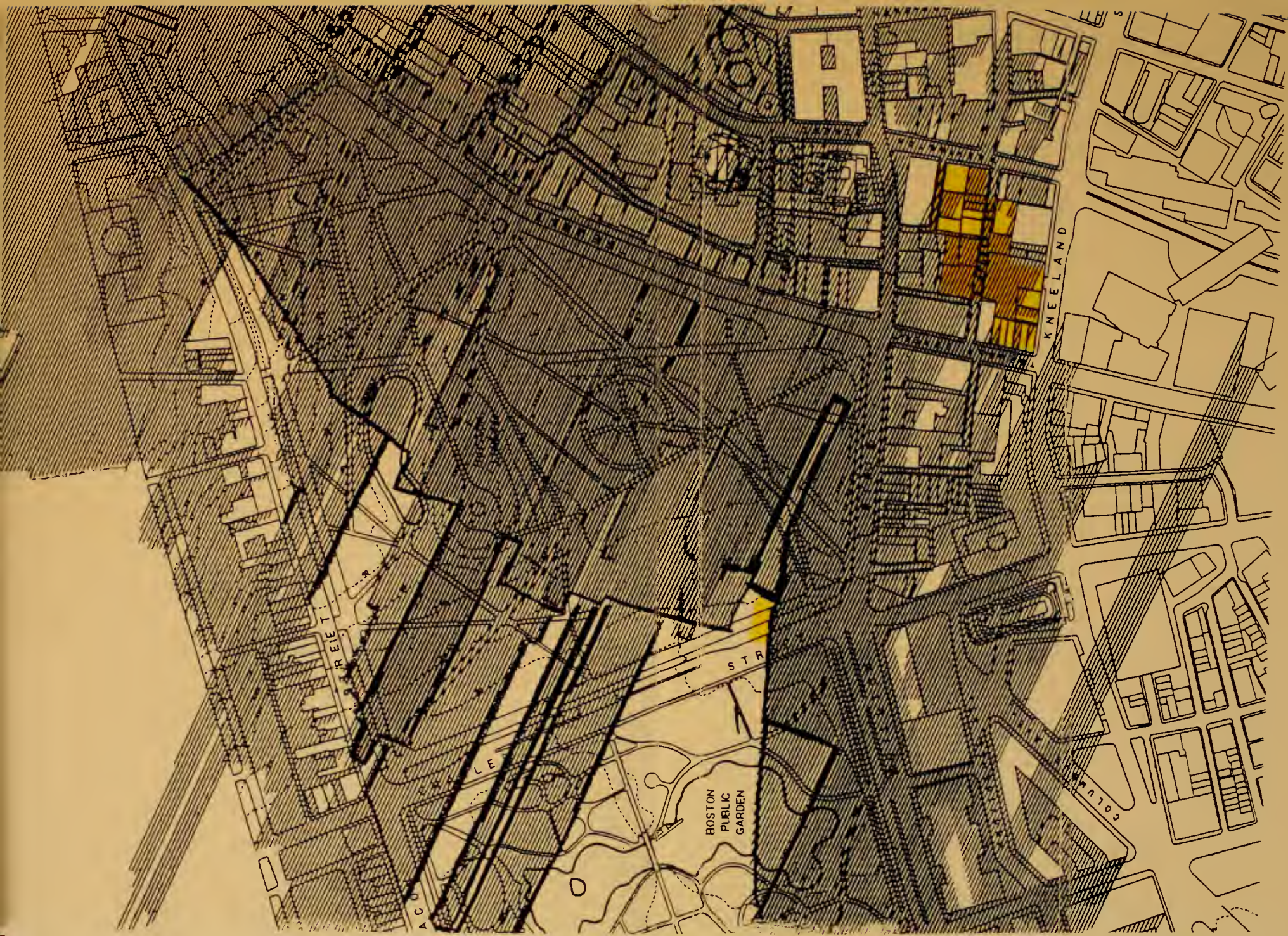
These assets create some environmental constraints for new development on the Hinge Block. The massing and height for new buildings on the block must be designed so as to minimize any negative environmental impacts upon the pedestrian environment, such as increased wind velocity or shadows. The environmental effects of proposed new construction will need to be tested and analyzed to ensure that negative impacts on the area's historic resources, on its open spaces and on Chinatown are minimized.

The Midtown Cultural District Plan and Zoning should be consulted for specific requirements regarding shadow and wind criteria.

### Shadow

A series of computer generated shadow studies were developed for the Midtown Cultural District Plan by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill and David Dixon Associates and more recently by Sasaki for the Hinge Block itself. The studies depict the shadows which would occur as a result of the projected build-out of the Hinge Block. The areas that could be affected by new buildings shadows are:

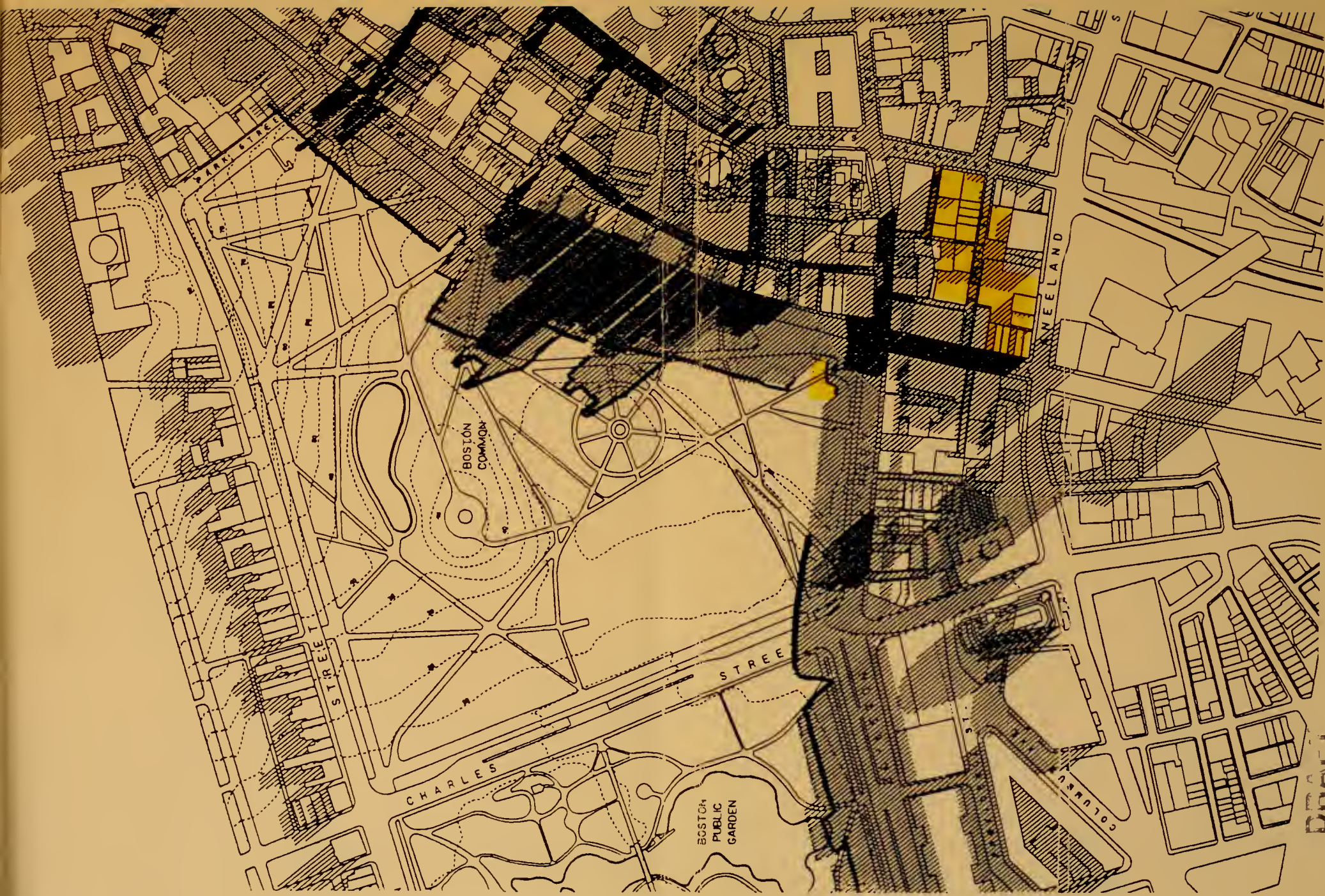




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Discussion Purposes Only

Oct. 21, 8:00 AM





DRAWN

For  
Discussion Purposes Or

Oct. 21, 10:00 AM



- a portion of Boston Common during the morning hours in the winter, spring and fall months, and
- parts of lower Washington Street during the late afternoon hours of the winter, spring and fall months.

As specific development projects are reviewed, the primary environmental consideration will be to minimize the amount of new shadows on the area's parks, public plazas, major pedestrian streets, and on Chinatown. New zoning for the Hinge Block will set limits on net new shadows generated by new development.

### Wind

Wind tests will be conducted to evaluate existing conditions and test new conditions generated by proposed projects on the Hinge Block. Conditions should be maintained at a comfortable wind velocity for pedestrians, with no significant increases in overall wind levels for the area's major pedestrian streets, alleys and public spaces. The resulting wind speeds should be low enough to create a comfortable pedestrian environment and to accommodate long term stationary activities in the area's streets, parks and public plazas. This is of critical importance in realizing key goals of both the Midtown and Hinge Block plans which are to create usable outdoor public plazas, increase pedestrian and retail activity, and enliven streets with outdoor cafes and restaurants.

Under the development review requirements of Article 31 of the Zoning Code, all proponents of major new projects must analyze potential wind and shadow impacts and propose mitigation measures where necessary in order to receive project approval.

### Housing

The revitalization of the Hinge Block creates an opportunity to develop new housing, par-

ticularly in light of its proximity to Chinatown, Bay Village, and South Cove.

There are currently about 325 units of housing on the block. The Hotel Touraine Building (now Sixty-two on Boylston) on the corner of Boylston and Tremont Streets across from the Boston Common, has been converted from its original hotel use and currently has 276 residential apartments. Three buildings near the Touraine on Tremont Street also have residential units on the upper floors. On La Grange Street two small row houses have residences on the upper floors.

The housing objectives for the Hinge Block are:

- to provide additional residential uses to supplement the block's existing housing stock;
- to extend the area's housing east from Back Bay, Park Square and Bay Village, and west from Chinatown and South Cove; and
- to address Chinatown's need for affordable housing by exploring the feasibility of affordable housing on the corner of Washington and Stuart Streets due to its proximity to Chinatown.

### Chinatown

The Hinge Block overlaps both Chinatown and the Midtown Cultural District. Because it is a key intersection between the areas, the block is envisioned as a new focus for establishing and cementing a relationship between the Asian community and the Cultural District.

The objectives of the Hinge Block Plan regarding Chinatown are:

- to continue the expansion of Asian businesses on the block by creating commercial opportunities for residents of Chinatown in future development projects;



- to respect the scale of buildings in Chinatown by encouraging development on the Hinge Block that is mid-rise and incremental so as to preserve the intimate scale, architectural integrity, and characteristic urban fabric of the neighborhood;
- to address the long-standing need for affordable housing for Chinatown families by investigating sites for affordable housing production, geared to the Asian community; and
- to promote a pattern of vehicular and pedestrian traffic on the block which respects the Chinatown community and improves Chinatown's own traffic patterns and pedestrian access.

## Neighborhood Business

The Hinge Block's location adjacent to Chinatown accounts for the presence of Asian businesses in the area. The China Trade Center houses several Chinese food retail shops and restaurants, and the Publix Theatre is used to store food supplies and produce for the area's Chinese restaurants and stores.

The primary policy goals for increasing the presence of neighborhood businesses in the Hinge Block are:

- to promote the participation of neighborhood businesses, particularly those in new development that serve area residents, and
- to ensure the equity participation of Asian developers in Hinge Block development projects.

## Transportation

The Hinge Block is well served by public transportation, with the Boylston Green line MBTA stop at the corner of Boylston and Tremont Streets, and the Chinatown stop of the Orange line at the corner of Boylston

and Washington Streets. An abandoned entrance to the Orange line is on La Grange Street. Commuter rail and Amtrak's Northeast Corridor Service at South Station are a short distance from the Hinge Block, as is the Greyhound Bus Terminal at Park Square.

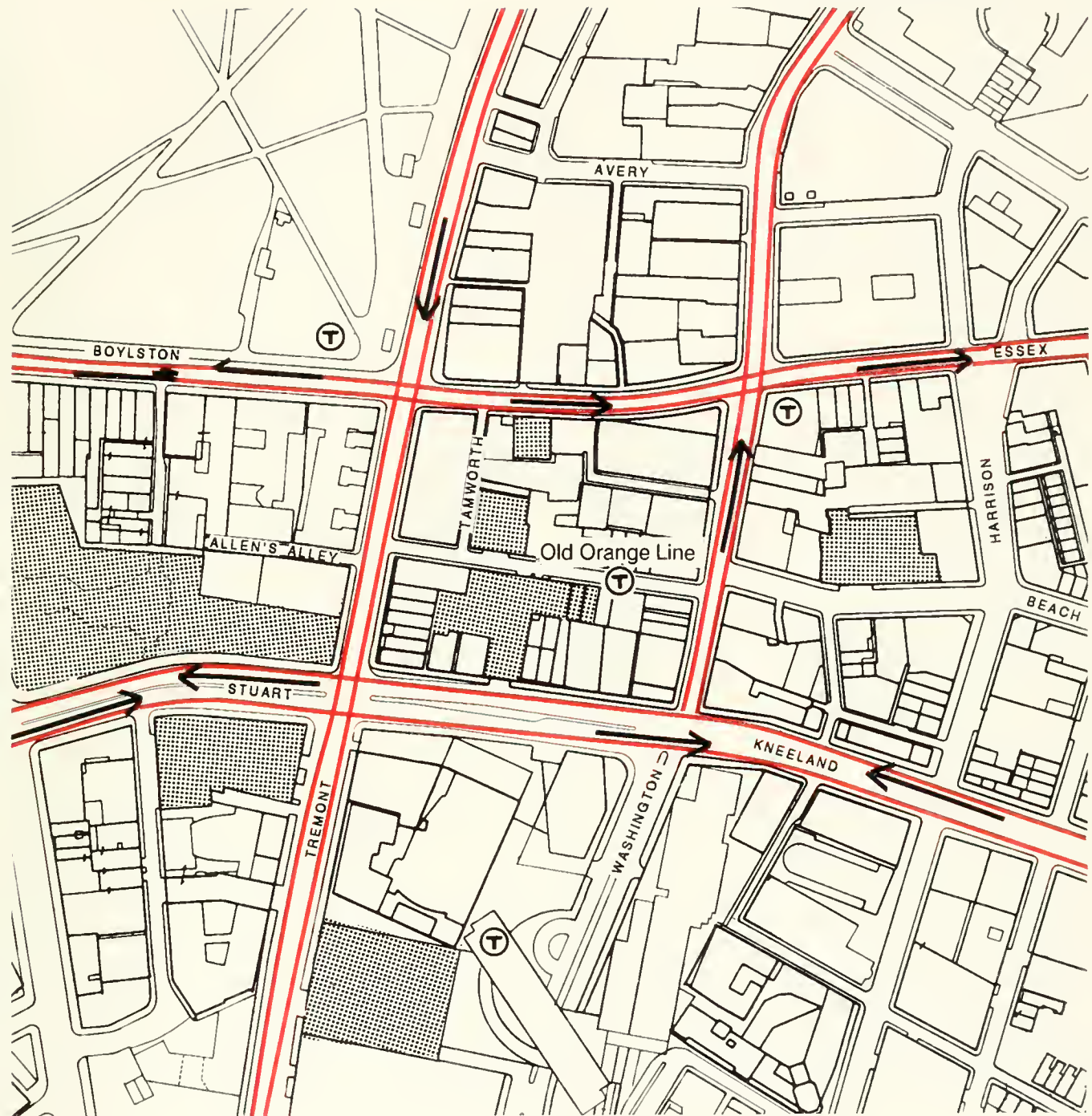
The Hinge Block currently has three active surface parking lots for 75 to 85 cars totaling approximately 30,000 square feet.





The Hinge Block Plan's transportation goals are:

- to encourage the reopening of the MBTA's Orange Line subway entrance on La Grange Street to facilitate public access to the block;
- to study the elimination of the existing surface parking on the block, and the feasibility of creating below-grade parking; and
- to assess future parking requirements for potential Hinge Block development and nearby theaters, offices and residences.



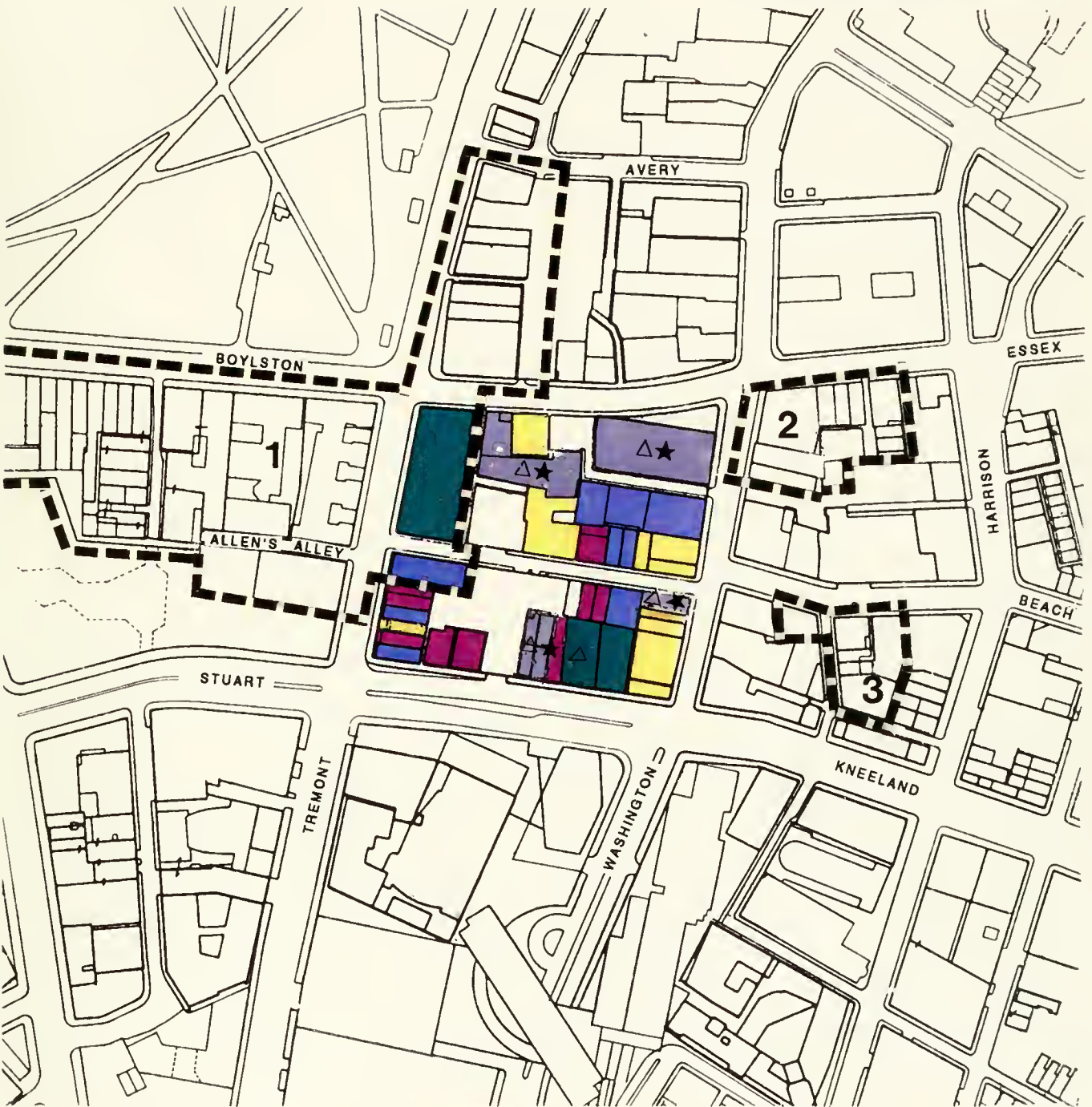
## Transportation



-  Existing Parking Facilities
-  Transit Station
-  Most Heavily Traveled Streets
-  Traffic Direction



# Historic Building Ratings

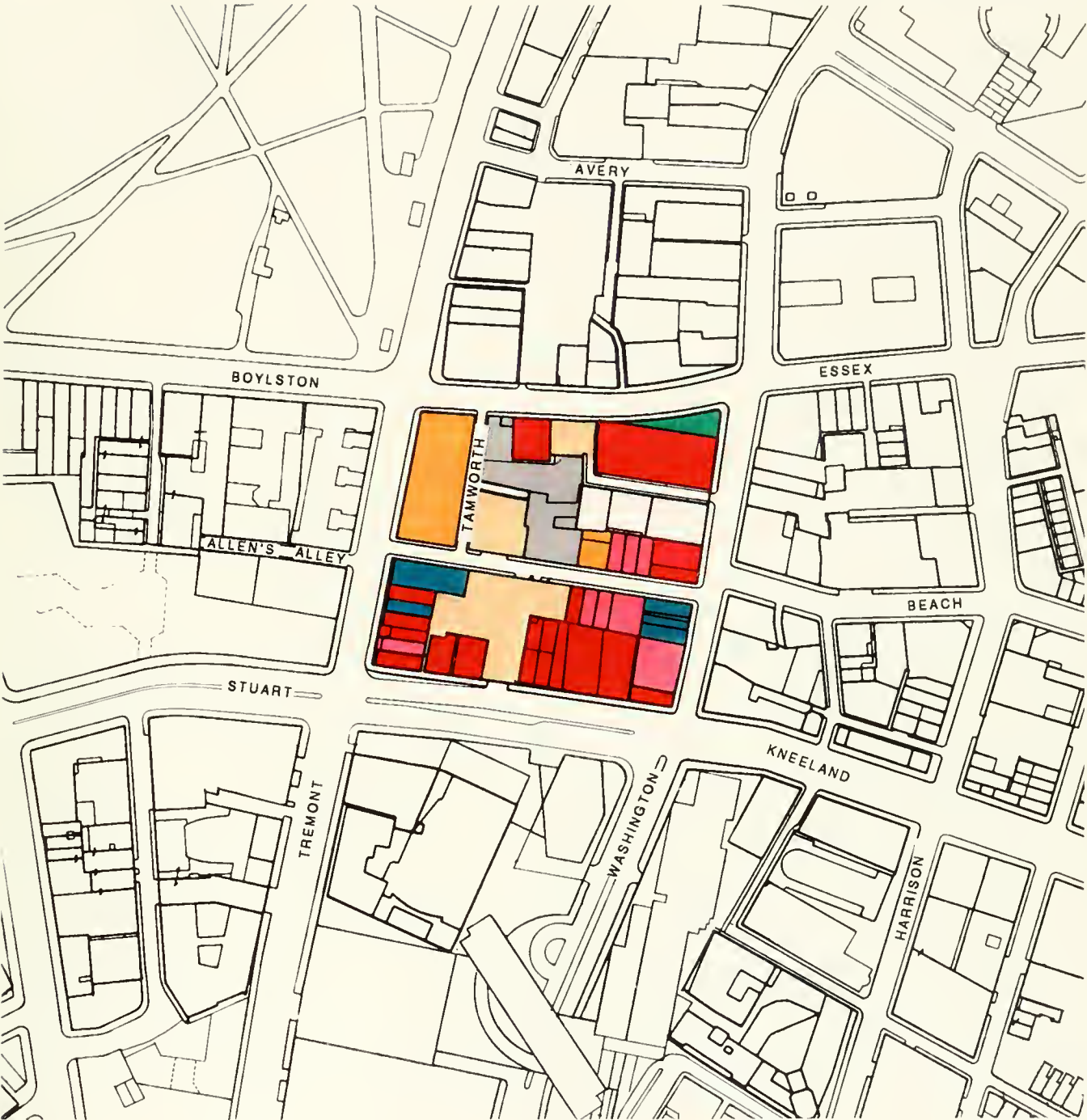


- Category I
- Category II
- Category III
- Category IV
- Category V
- Category VI

- National Register  
Historic District Boundary
- 1 Piano Row
- 2 Liberty Tree
- 3 Beach/Knapp
- △ National Register  
Individual Listing
- ★ BLC Designated Landmark



Existing Land Use:  
Ground Level



- Commercial
- Institutional
- Entertainment
- Warehouse/Storage
- Vacant Buildings
- Vacant Lot with Surface Parking
- Open Space
- Residential

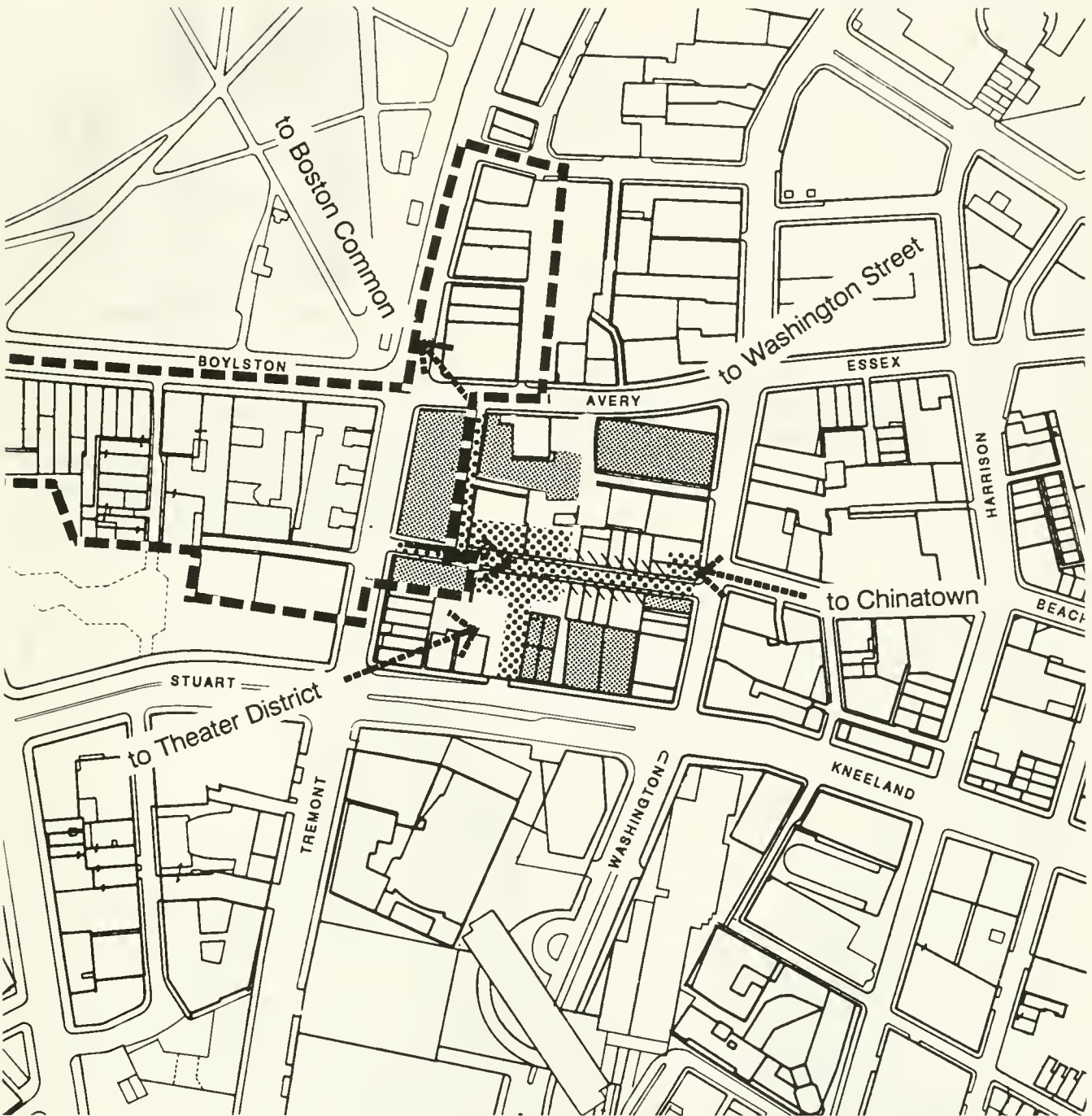






### Building Heights



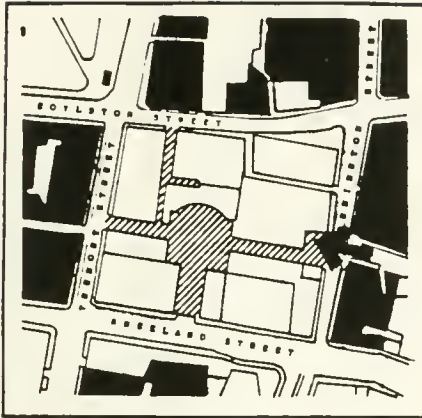


## Historic Buildings and Open Space Network



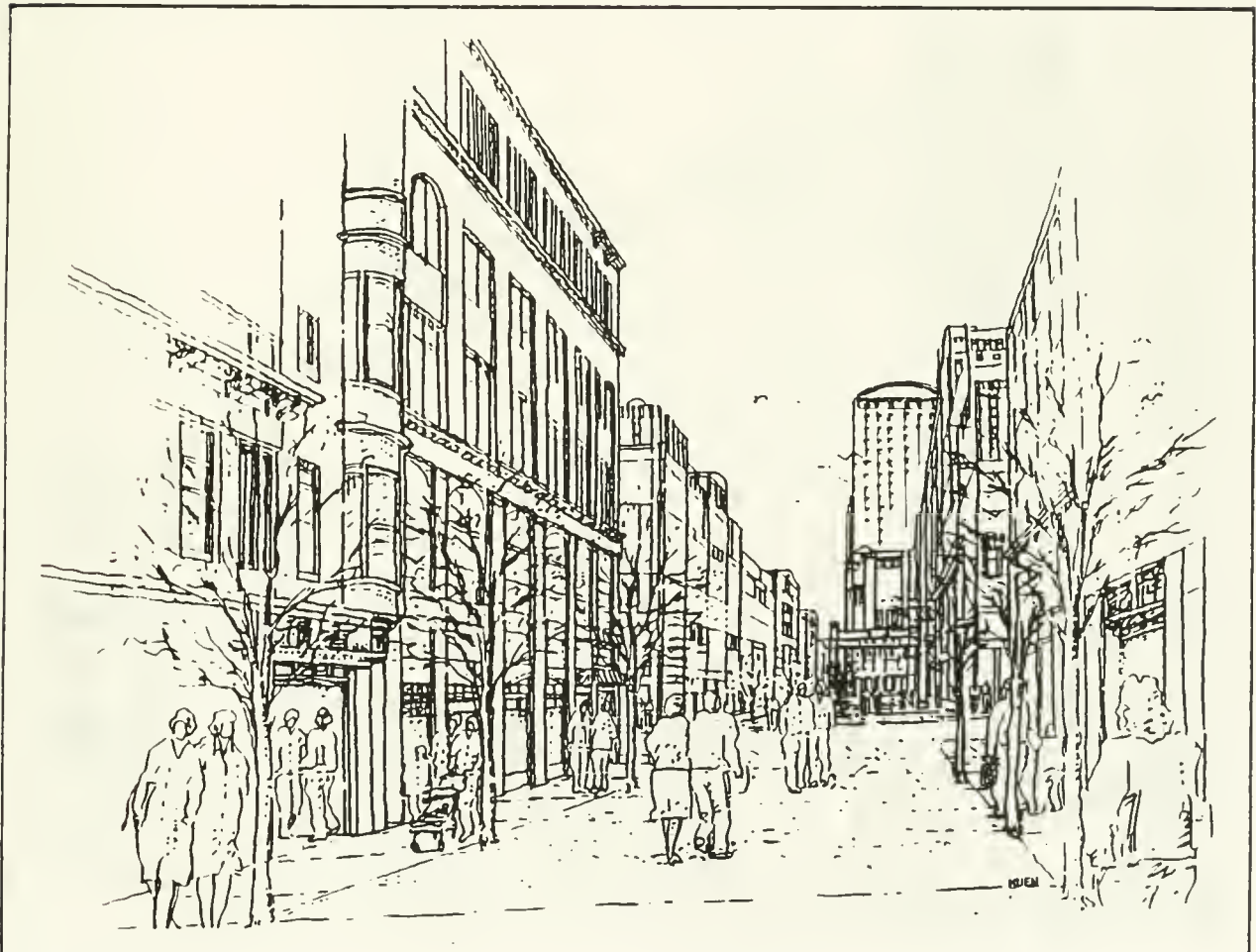
-  Historic Buildings to be Preserved
-  National Register of Historic District Boundary (Piano Row)
-  Potential Open Space
-  Required Pedestrian Connection
-  Optional Covered Public Arcade



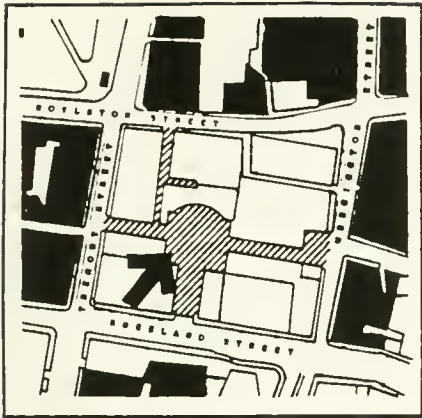


This picture illustrates the view down Beach Street to a redeveloped Hinge Block. The pocket park shown on the corner of LaGrange and Washington Street connects the main pedestrian corridor of Chinatown, Beach Street, to LaGrange Street in the

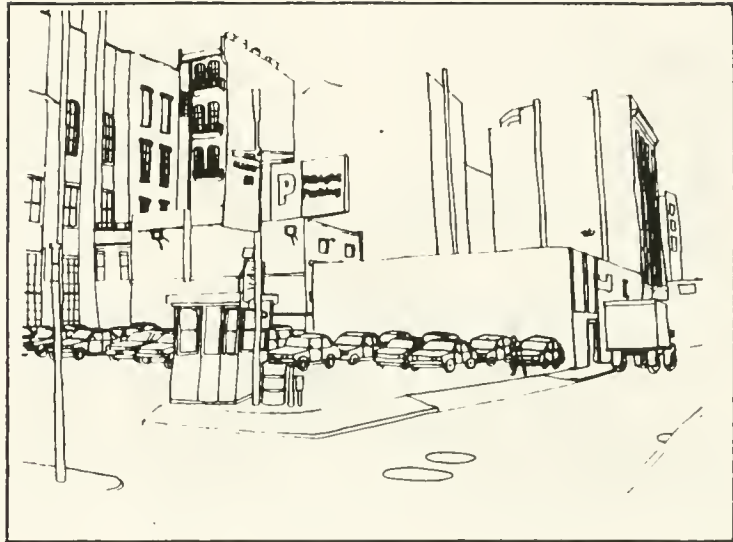
Hinge Block. This reunites Chinatown with the Hinge Block and the Theatre District, and at the same time creates a system of open space.







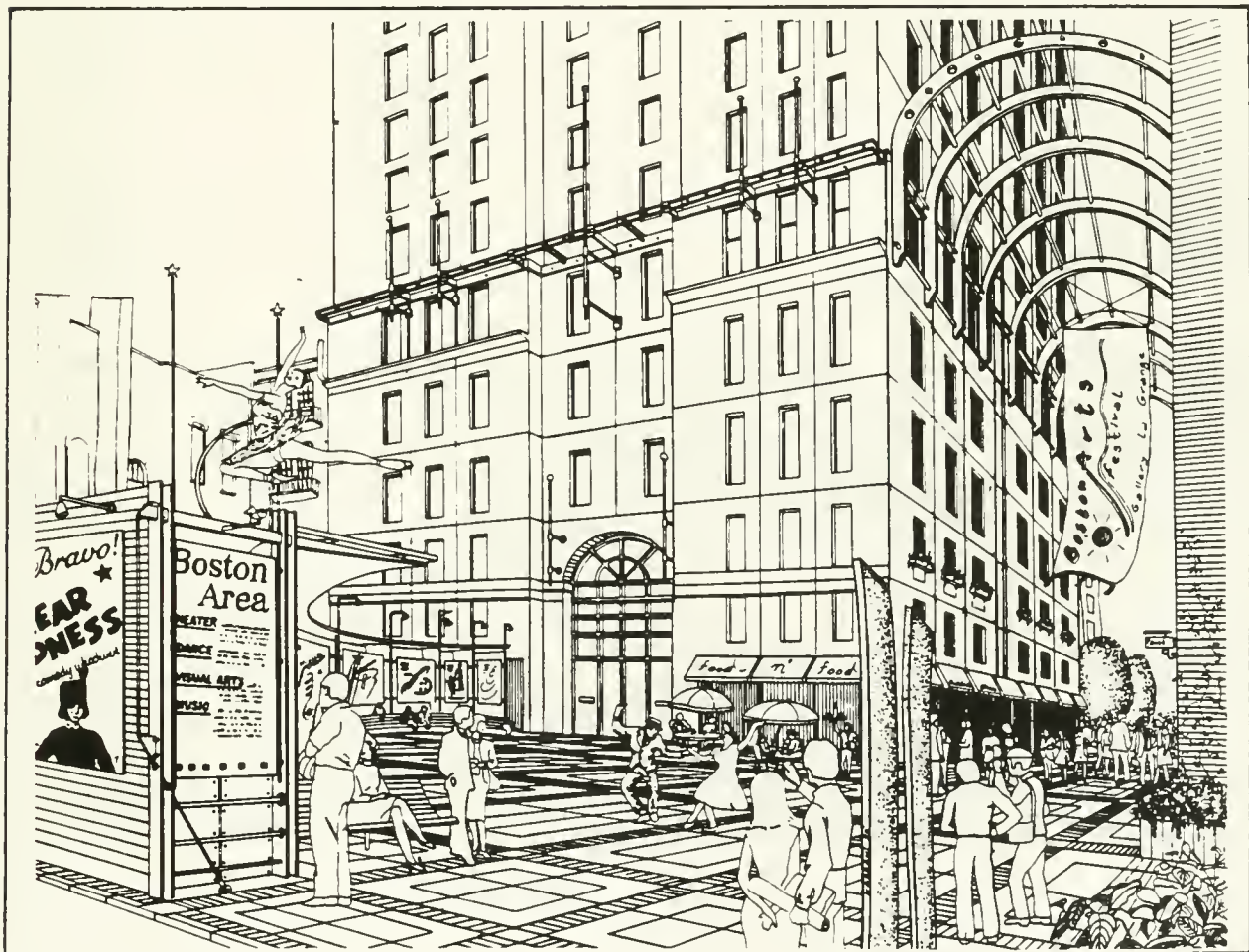
1. View illustrating existing conditions along LaGrange Street looking towards Washington Street.



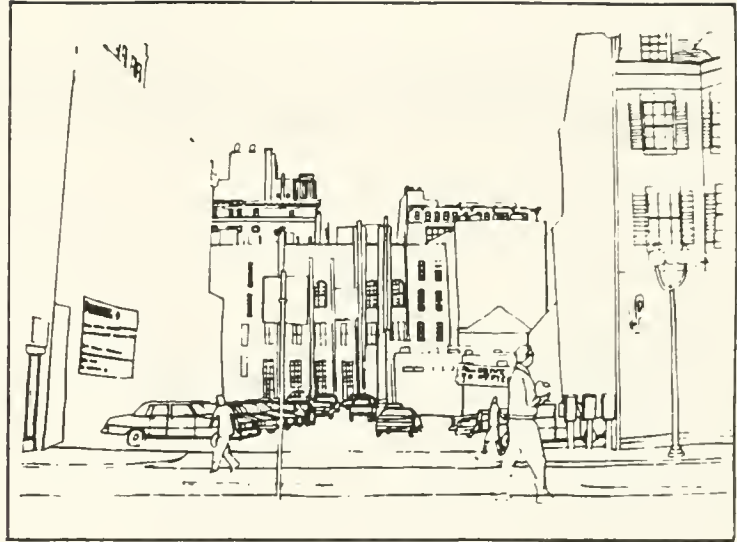
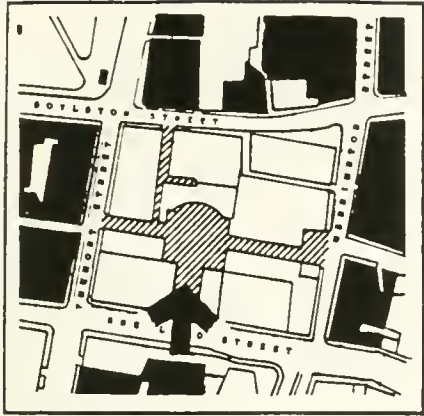
1.

2. The same view illustrating an open space in the center of LaGrange Street surrounded by commercial activities and artist galleries and displays.

2.





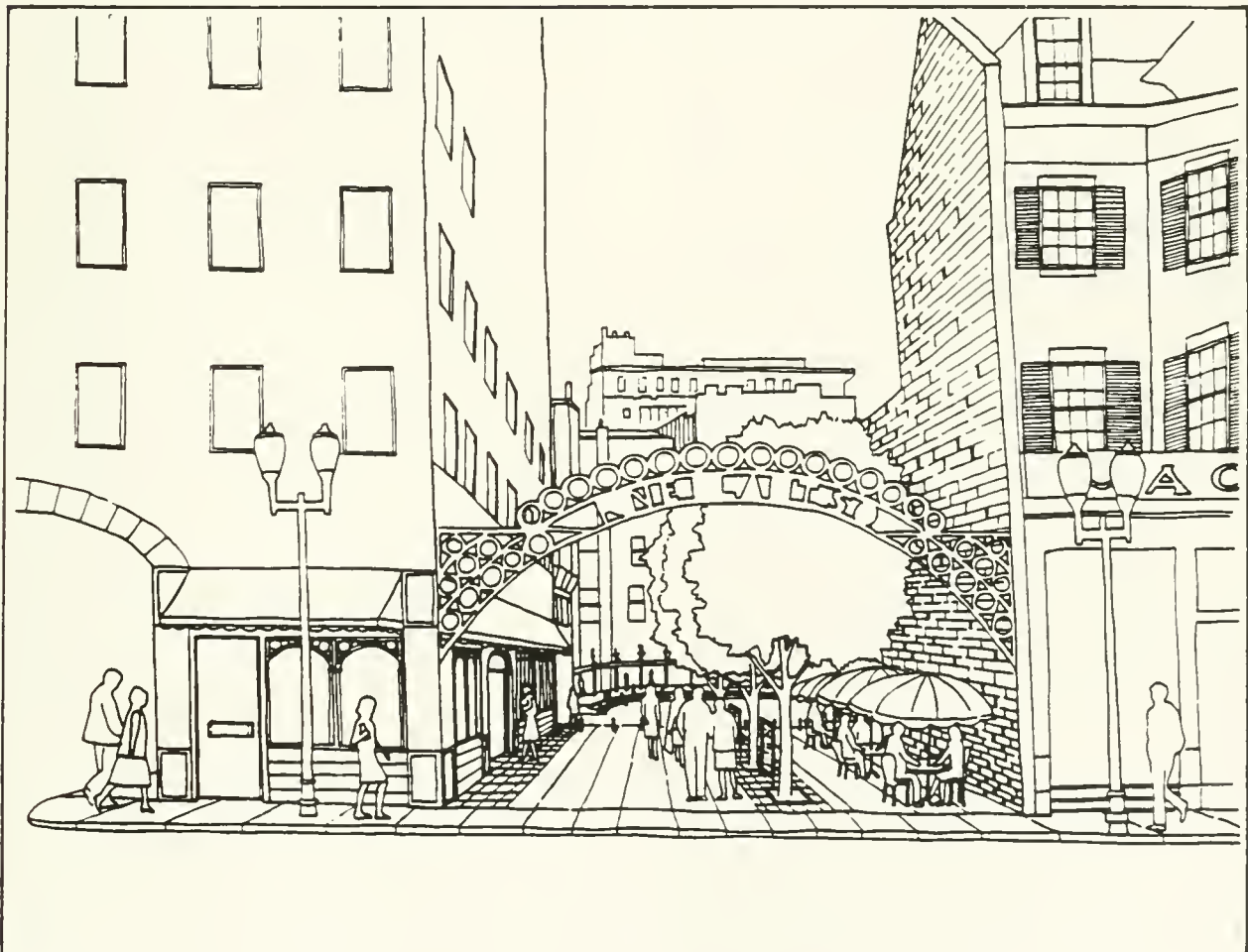


1.

1. View illustrating existing conditions between Kneeland Street and LaGrange Street near Jacob Wirth historic building.

2. The same view illustrating a pedestrian-pocket park to linking the theater district and the opens space on LaGrange Street.

2.





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#### IV. HINGE BLOCK STUDIES



## IV. HINGE BLOCK STUDIES

For more than 20 years city planners and community members have identified the Hinge Block as a key parcel in the revitalization of Boston's theater district, and therefore it has been the subject of an exhaustive array of planning efforts over the years.

Plans dating back to the 1950s suggested revitalization of the site by locating a major anchor use in a high-rise building at the center of the block. According to the proposal, the key to the mixed-use project was a "central media programming facility, as a component of a larger mixed-use project, that would place Boston in the forefront of the expanding cable/video/communications industry.

The development would have included an 800,000 square foot office tower of 600 feet in height, at least 200 units of housing, a communications/media center, public spaces, and the communications center.

An interesting part of this plan was the idea of using ice thermal storage to cool the building. Ice would have been stored under Parcel C-4 which is next to an abandoned subway tunnel.

Current planing studies done for the Hinge Block divert from the idea of a central anchor tower and instead recommend a mix of uses and a variety of heights with buildings in the low- to mid-rise ranges. These studies suggest the block's image as a cluster of buildings, almost like a small medieval village.

The Midtown Cultural District Plan of 1989 contained several urban design studies which explored different schemes for development of the Hinge Block.

As part of the Plan, the BRA and two consultants, Benjamin Thompson Associates (BTA) and Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM), Chicago (the designers of Rowes Wharf), studied different configurations for the block, which is equal in size to two or three Financial District Blocks. Three different configurations were studied for the Hinge Block. Two were prepared by SOM, the other was done by BTA. All three plans create a new public space at the center of the block and preserve the block's historic buildings. BTA emphasized the pedestrian environment of the block and its relation to the surrounding public space system. SOM looked at the overall massing of the Hinge Block, including the scale of building elements taller than 80 feet and their relation to potential massing in surrounding developments.

### **Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Chicago (SOM)**

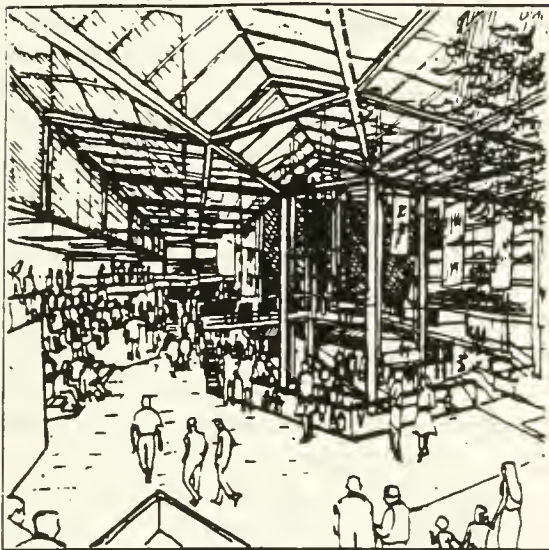
SOM developed two alternative design schemes for the Hinge Block. Both designs included a major public gathering space at the center of the block, and included performance spaces, office and retail functions.

#### **Scheme A**

Scheme A called for a grand, enclosed winter garden surrounded by a multi-level, glass-covered space. This central space would be surrounded by stores, cafes, and galleries. All new buildings on the Hinge Block would connect from the main street to the winter garden. The scheme would require a single parcel owner for all of the Hinge Block or an agreement by different owners to jointly develop the Hinge Block. LaGrange Street would be open for pedestrian access through the block.

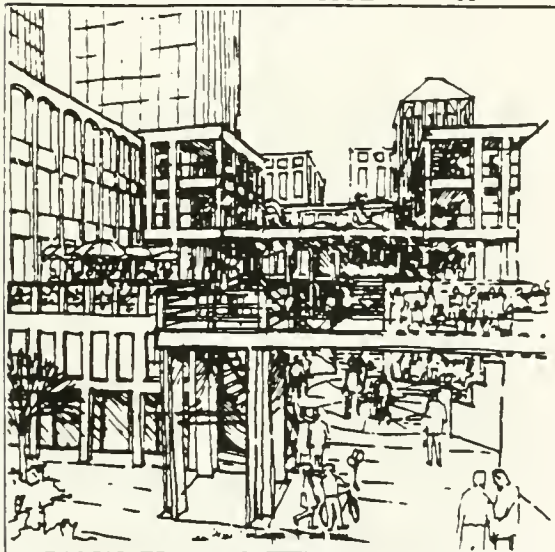


According to SOM, under this scheme "... A multi-level, terraced central space is created that provides varied impromptu and controlled performance space as well as commercial and retail functions. The central space would be glass-covered and become a destination for the Midtown area, especially during the winter ... It also becomes a destination for the region at night with its commercial, office, and arts/theatrical orientation. A towering skylight structure provides a Cultural District identity and a graphic billboard with an energy level of Times Square. ... The common, central space is surrounded by towers, two residential and one office."



INTERIOR PERSPECTIVE

#### HINGE BLOCK SITE A



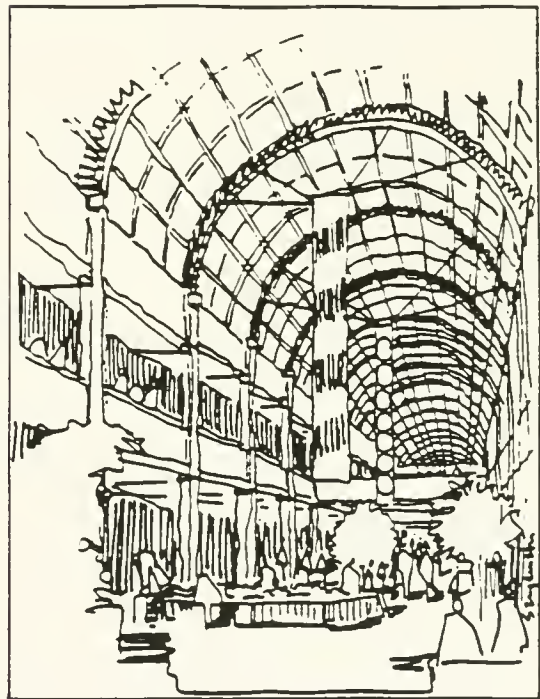
INTERIOR PERSPECTIVE

#### HINGE BLOCK SITE B

#### Scheme B

Scheme B called for a central open area surrounded by a series of open and enclosed spaces, courts, and terraces connected by a network of bridges, gallerias, and walkways. These areas would be connected through interior spaces surrounding a central courtyard type space.

According to SOM, "One of the site concepts is to create a series of overlapping spaces, and arts/performance areas of various heights, levels, and proportions that enhance one's movement through or into the Hinge Block. ... The major thrust of the scheme is that as one enters one of the spaces in the Hinge Block, there is the sense that something else (a performance or other activity) is going on in an adjacent area several levels above. ... A 199-seat theater becomes a focus in the major space with art galleries, museums, commercial/retail, cafes and impromptu performance spaces highlighting other areas."



INTERIOR PERSPECTIVE

*Perspective Views by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Chicago*



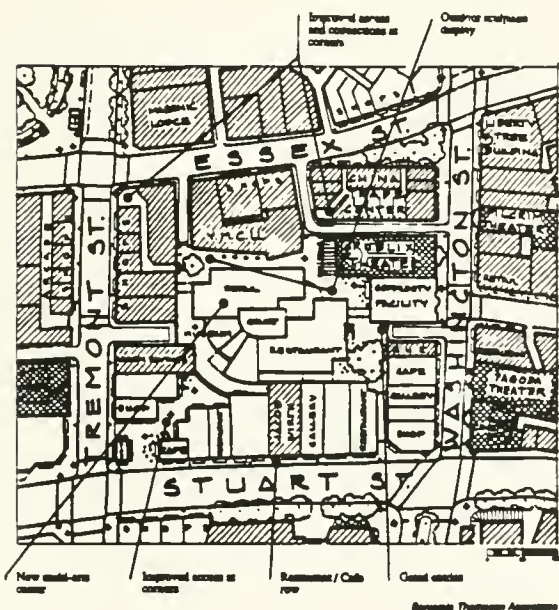
## Benjamin Thompson Associates, Cambridge (BTA)

In 1987-88 BTA was hired to prepare a public space program for the Midtown Cultural District Plan, an area the firm had previously studied in 1978. Included in those studies were a series of plans for the Hinge Block. As part of his work for the Midtown Cultural District Plan, Thompson suggested an open space network with an arts facility at the center surrounded by cafes, kiosks, and shops.

Thompson described the Hinge Block as "the geographical and functional center of the new Cultural District. It has several historic buildings in it ... At its center is a spacious area which lends itself to the creation of a protected pedestrian place with a new architectural element as its focus. This building could house a museum, as well as shops and offices, an outdoor sculpture garden, and a cafe, all taking advantage of the light and warmth of its southern exposure. The new building will be visible from the Stuart/Tremont intersection, and that corner will be redesigned to invite people to enter and walk through the block. On this edge of "Tremont Circus," a corner kiosk will attract pedestrians, and offer services supportive of the theater and nightlife activities nearby.

## Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA)

In 1988-89 the BRA studied the Hinge Block in order to further refine the initial concepts for the block as presented in the Midtown Cultural District Plan. Several design alternatives were developed, all of which included a mix of uses such as office, hotel and housing, with an open space component, ground level retail functions, cultural facilities, and affordable housing.





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## V. ACHIEVING THE PLAN



## V. ACHIEVING THE PLAN

### Zoning

#### The Downtown Interim Planning Overlay District

In 1987, the Zoning Commission approved Article 27D which established interim zoning controls for the downtown while the BRA conducted district planning. The Hinge Block was located in a Medium Growth Sub-district in which new development could achieve a height of 125 feet and FAR 8 as-of-right and 155 feet and FAR 10 if certain criteria were met.

#### The Midtown Cultural District Plan and Zoning Regulation

The Midtown Cultural District Plan was developed to guide the reemergence of Midtown Boston as a center of commerce, culture, and city life. The program that emerged from the community-based planning process called for the creation of a mixed-use downtown community which will link the Back Bay and Financial District office markets and reconnect downtown's residential neighborhoods with each other and with the Boston Common and Public Garden.

The Midtown Cultural District Plan was adopted by the BRA on January 12, 1989 as the portion of the general plan for the city governing the Midtown Cultural District. On March 6, 1989, the Boston Zoning Commission amended the Code to incorporate Article 38 which contains the zoning regulations which constitute the legal framework for the realization of the Plan. Article 38 became the permanent zoning for the area, superceding the interim controls of Article 27D.

#### The Hinge Block Special Study Area

The Midtown Cultural District Zoning established the Hinge Block Special Study Area and required that a comprehensive plan be developed which addressed the following: (a) appropriate means to preserve and encourage the rehabilitation and restoration of the notable and significant historic buildings which characterize the Hinge Block; (b) a plan for the creation of theaters and cultural facilities on the Hinge Block; (c) appropriate means to encourage the creation of housing, including affordable housing; (d) a Neighborhood Business Opportunities Plan; (e) an open space plan for the interior of the Hinge Block, which is characterized by vacant and underutilized land; (f) the appropriate mix of land uses to accomplish these objectives; and (g) land use regulations necessary to implement the comprehensive plan's proposals (Section 38-9).

#### Hinge Block Zoning

##### ● Planned Development Area

Zoning for the Hinge Block reflects the Plan's objectives of both preserving the scale and character of this historic block while encouraging appropriate new development. Therefore, in the center of the block, spanning La Grange Street, an area has been designated as a Planned Development Area (PDA). In this area, a height of 125 to 155 feet can be achieved as-of-right, and up to 275 feet as a PDA if the project complies with certain Midtown Cultural District regulations, including the shadow, streetwall, setback, floorplate, and ground floor use regulations. The proponent of a PDA project must submit a Development Plan in accordance with



Section 3.1A of the Zoning Code and show that the project's benefits outweigh its burdens.

- **Protection Areas**

Along the edges of the block, lower heights are contemplated to reinforce the existing streetwall. Along Tremont Street, where it intersects with Boylston, a protection area is planned where heights cannot exceed 125 feet. Along Boylston, another protection area limits building height to 80 feet, and at the Stuart/Washington Street corner a height of 100 feet will be permitted.

### **The Chinatown Community Plan and Zoning**

The Hinge Block Plan supports the principles established in the Chinatown Community Plan and the requirements of Article 43 of the Boston Zoning Code adopted in June 1990 which establishes the legal framework for the implementation of the Chinatown Plan.

### **Implementation**

The Hinge Block Plan and proposed zoning regulations will be the subject of a public hearing before the Board of the Boston Redevelopment Authority. If adopted, the zoning implementing the plan will be submitted to the Boston Zoning Commission for a public hearing. If approved, the Zoning Code would be amended and the Hinge Block Plan would become the portion of the general plan for the city governing the Hinge Block.



### Proposed Zoning



- |   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|
|  | 65' Protection Area     |
|  | 80' Protection Area     |
|  | 100' Protection Area    |
|  | 125' Protection Area    |
|  | 125' - 155' As-of-Right |

275' PDA must comply with the following Midtown Cultural District Regulations:

- ★ Shadow
- ★ Streetwalk
- ★ Floorplate
- ★ Ground Floor Use
- ★ Setbacks

LaGrange, Stuart, Tremont, and  
Washington Streets

above street wall height - 10'

above 155' (total setback from wall -15')

Above 235' (total setback from streetwall - 15')

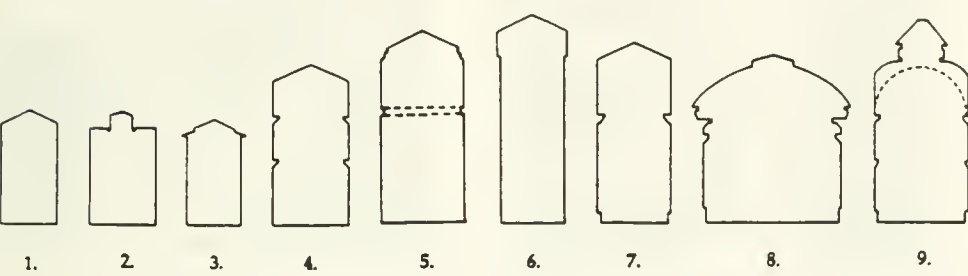


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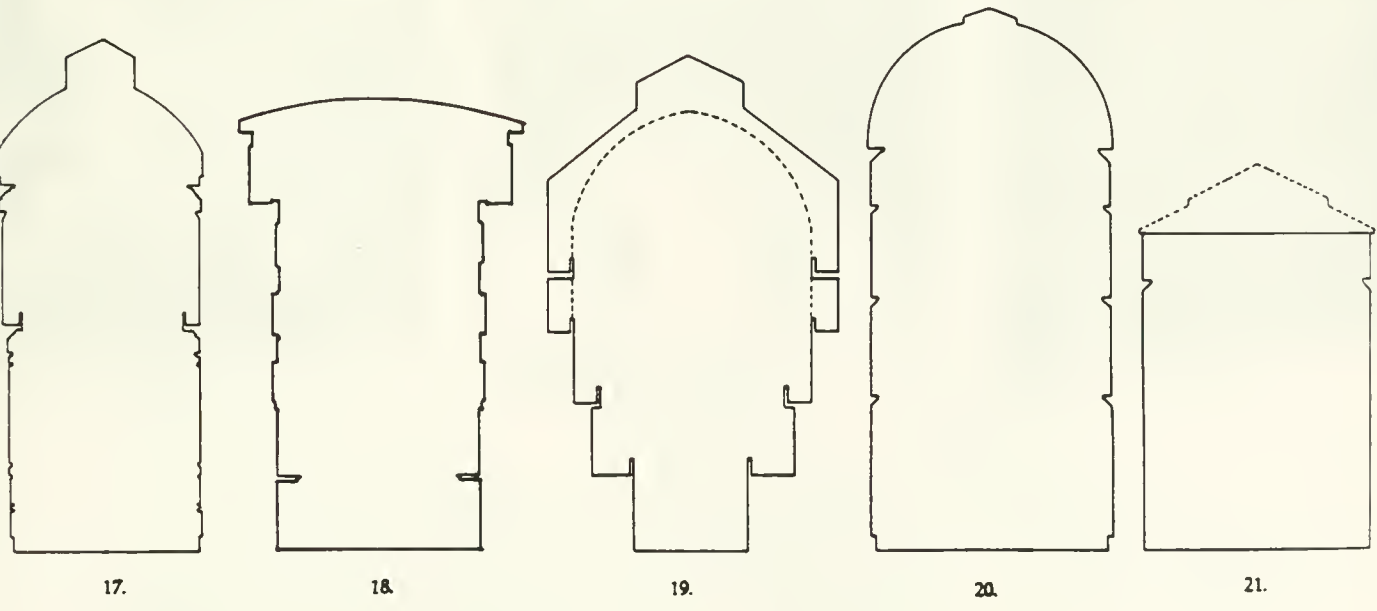
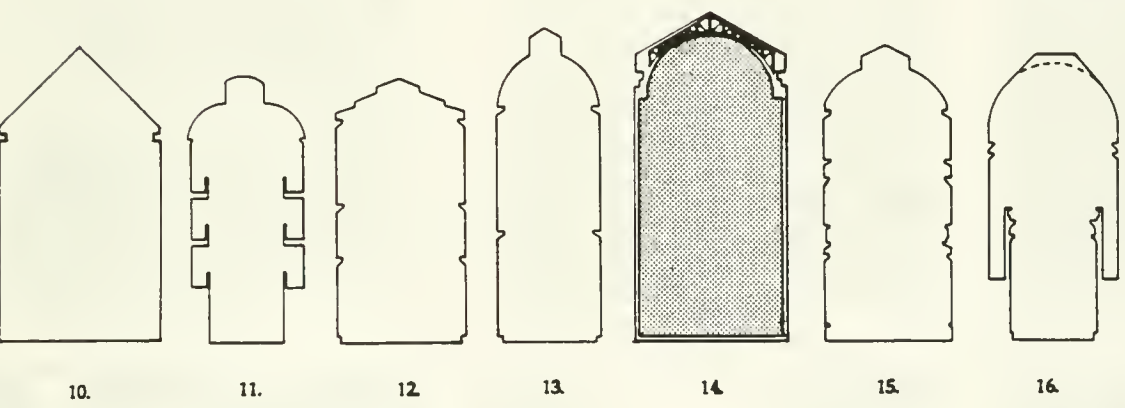
## APPENDIX



# A TYPOLOGY OF ARCADES



1. Paris, Passage des Panoramas, 1800
2. London, Royal Opera Arcade, 1816
3. London, Burlington Arcade, 1818
4. Paris, Galerie Vivienne, 1825
5. Boston Crossing, proposed Opera Way
6. Paris, Passage du Grand Cerf, 1825
7. Paris, Galerie Colbert, 1826
8. Paris, Galerie d'Orleans, 1829
9. London, Lowther Arcade, 1831
10. Boston, proposed Prudential Center Arcade
11. Manchester, Barton Arcade, 1871
12. Berlin, Kaisergalerie, 1873
13. The Hague, Passage, 1885
14. Boston, proposed La Grange Gallery
15. Brussels, Galeries St. Hubert, 1847
16. Hamburg, Sillem's Bazaar, 1845
17. Milan, Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, 1867
18. Boston, 75 State Street Lobby, 1988
19. Cleveland, Cleveland Arcade, 1890
20. Naples, Galleria Umberto I, 1891
21. Berlin, Friedrichstrassenpassage, 1908







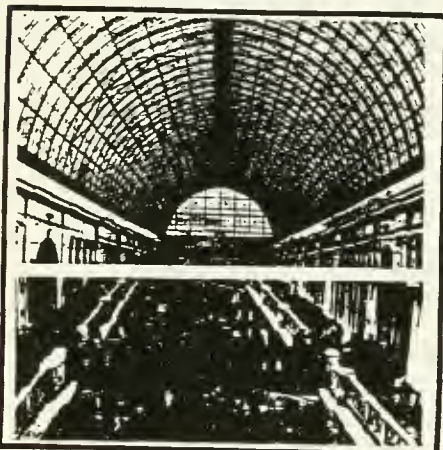
PASSAGE POMMERAYE - NANTES



GALLERIA VITTORIO EMANUEL II - MILAN  
196.62M X 14.5M X 29.28M



KAISERGALERIE, BERLIN



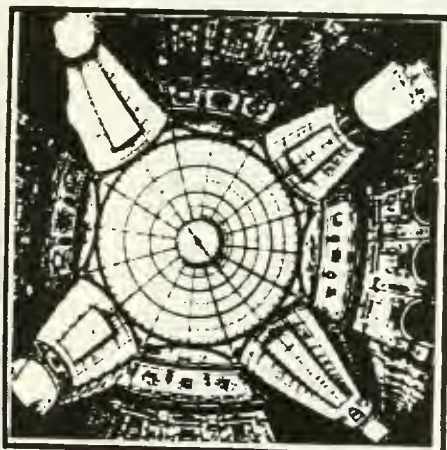
PETROVSKY ARCADE - MOSCOW



GALLERIA UMBERTO I - NAPLES



GALLERIA MAZZINI - GENOA  
128.75M X 7.85M X 13.5M



GALLERIA VITTORIO EMANUEL II - MILAN  
ROTUNDA 38.6M X 47.08M

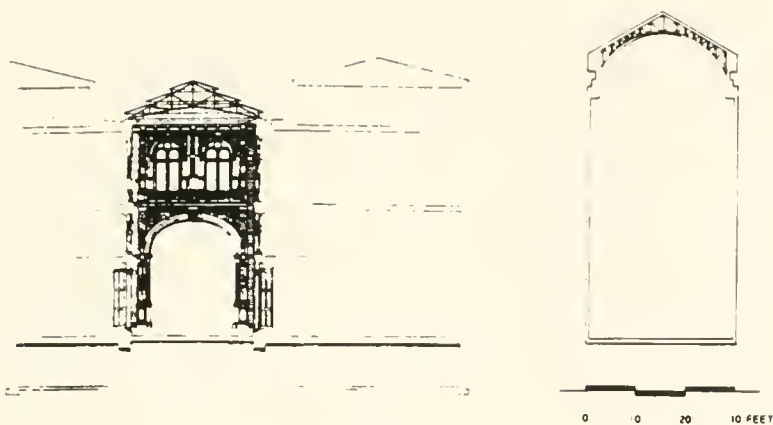


CLEVELAND ARCADE - CLEVELAND  
115M X 18.5M X 30.5M



THORNTONS ARCADE - LEEDS  
76M X 4.5M





Comparison of Berlin Kaisergalerie  
Section ( far left ) with proposed  
La Grange Street Arcade Section  
( left ).

Interior view of Kaisergalerie  
( below ).





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